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FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9179
INFO RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA IMMEDIATE 2284
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000389

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, INR/AA AND INR/GGI
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [DJ](#) [ER](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT VISITS BORDER TO ASSESS
ERITREAN INCURSION

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 388 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. DJIBOUTI 380 (NOTAL)
[1](#)C. DJIBOUTI 377 (NOTAL)
[1](#)D. 04/21/2008 MCMULLEN-WONG EMAIL

Classified By: ERIC WONG, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (U) ACTION REQUEST. See paragraph 8.

[1](#)2. (S) SUMMARY. Helicopter reconnaissance of Ras Doumeira on April 22, by Djibouti's President and Foreign Minister, found Eritrean troops, tents, and fortifications at the disputed border. Djiboutian and Eritrean military representatives will hold a "technical" meeting on April 24, in order to review the boundary at Ras Doumeira. Djibouti's FM may travel to Asmara, in order to assure the GSE that the U.S. military presence in Djibouti is not aimed at destabilizing Eritrea. While Djibouti hopes for a diplomatic solution, it considers Eritrea "unpredictable," and warns that "any act of aggression on Djibouti would have to be answered." END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (S) Djibouti's Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Yousseuf informed Charge on the evening of April 22 that he had accompanied President Guelleh earlier in the day to visit, by helicopter, the site of an Eritrean military encampment on disputed territory at Ras Doumeira (refs B-C). FM Yousseuf said the GODJ had asked Eritrea to withdraw its troops from the mountain at Ras Doumeira, but that Eritrea had now deployed "hundreds of armed soldiers" there. The Djiboutian military was reporting that Eritrea was sending additional troops to the border, he said, and tensions were increasing. Eritrean tents, foxholes, and fortifications had been visible at Ras Doumeira.

[1](#)4. (S) Charge informed the Foreign Minister that the USG had raised the issue earlier with the GSE in Asmara, and that Isaias, senior foreign policy advisor Yemane Ghebreab had informed Embassy Asmara that Eritrea had no claims on Djiboutian territory (ref D). FM Yousseuf said that in an April 21 telcon, President Isaias had made the same assurance to President Guelleh, asserting that Eritrea had "no ambitions" on Djiboutian territory. Despite this statement, however, Eritrea had "planted troops on the border". Djibouti did not seek to start any hostilities, Yousseuf said, but he expressed concern that Eritrea was "unpredictable," and that "any act of aggression on Djibouti

would have to be answered." Youssouf said he was conveying the same information to French Ambassador Dominique DeCherf.

DJIBOUTI'S FOREIGN MINISTER MAY TRAVEL TO ASMARA

15. (S) FM Youssouf said Djibouti still hoped for a diplomatic and political solution. He said Djibouti and Eritrea had agreed to conduct a "technical meeting" among military staff representatives on April 24, in order to compare maps and understandings about the demarcation of the border. Youssouf said the subsequent step would be for him to travel to Asmara to explore "a way to end this deadlock."

16. (S) Asked whether the GODJ sought a public statement from the USG on this situation, FM Youssouf agreed that a public statement by the USG now would not/not be helpful. He noted that an objective of his trip to Asmara would be to reassure the GSE that the U.S. (military) presence in Djibouti was "not oriented against Eritrea." (NOTE: Djibouti hosts 2,200-2,700 U.S. troops at Camp Lemonnier, home to the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, and the only U.S. military base in Africa. END NOTE.)

17. (S) COMMENT. Eritrea's recent establishment of structures on previously uninhabited Ras Doumeira, near the Bab al Mandab strait, may reflect escalating tensions with neighboring Ethiopia. Another likely possibility is that it represents an Eritrean attempt to deflect from Djibouti's ongoing efforts with the UN SRSG for Somalia (ref A) to host Somali peace talks between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Asmara-backed Alliance for the

DJIBOUTI 00000389 002.2 OF 002

Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). END COMMENT.

18. (S) ACTION REQUEST. FM Youssouf's first-hand observations of numerous Eritrean tents and fortifications on Ras Doumeira is consistent with recent imagery of Ras Doumeira that Charge and GRPO have been authorized to pass to appropriate GODJ principals on April 23. What remains unclear, however, is exactly where the boundary between the two countries lies. Given the wealth of information prepared by the Department in an effort to support the demarcation of the Ethiopia-Eritrea boundary, Post requests Department review whether any information--graphics, imagery, imagery-derived products, or maps--is available on the Djibouti-Eritrea boundary dispute, especially related to 1994 hostilities at Ras Doumeira. If such information is available and can be released to the GODJ (and/or GSE) before the April 24 technical meeting with Eritrean officials, it may help defuse escalating tensions. END ACTION REQUEST.
WONG